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THE GENERAL BOARD

United States Forces, European Theater

HANDICRAFT

MISSION: Prepare Report and Recommendations on the Handicraft Program in the European Theater.

The General Board was established by General Orders 126, Headquarters European Theater of Operations, US Army, dated 17 June 1945, as amended by General Orders 132, dated 7 August 1945 and General Orders 312 dated 20 November 1945, Headquarters United States Forces, European Theater, to prepare a factual analysis of the strategy, tactics, and administration employed by the United States forces in the European Theater.

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APO 408

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THE HANDICRAFT PROGRAM

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HANDICRAFT

SECTION 1

THE HANDICRAFT PROGRAM

1. General.¹

a. The special services handicraft program was designed to enable the soldier to spend his spare time in an interesting and useful manner, or to develop a vocation for after the war, and to enable those who were artists or craftsmen prior to entering the Army to continue their activities. The program was to include the following two types of activities:

Arts

Painting and Sketching
Clay Modeling
Sculpturing
Etching
Linoleum Block Printing
Silk Screen Printing
Poster Painting

Crafts

Leathercraft
Photography
Carpentry
Woodcarving
Metalcraft
Model Making
Puppetry
Knitting and Braiding
Fly-tying

b. The materials required to conduct these activities were packaged as separate kits, each containing the basic tools and raw materials necessary to a beginner, plus an illustrated guide.

c. It was planned that handicraft activities should take place at centrally located workshops and art studios.

2. Historical Data.

a. The handicraft program, as it is now known, was initiated originally as a soldier art program aimed directly for United States service commands, posts and stations. On 24 December 1942, the Commanding General, Services of Supply, sent out a letter, file SPSA 007, War Department, Services of Supply, Special Services Division, subject: "Interior Design and Soldier Art". This was the first letter announcing any program of arts and crafts.

b. Seven thousand five hundred dollars were made available to Special Services Division in January 1943, and, in amounts not to exceed \$200.00 each, were distributed to posts, camps and stations. This money was the first spent to promote art and craft work as a recreational program.

3. Program.

a. In March 1944, the Arts and Crafts Section (later changed to Handicraft Branch) was made a section of the Athletic and Recreation Branch of Special Services Division, War Department, and a broad program for crafts as well as art was planned.

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b. A course of instruction at the School for Special Services in Lexington, Virginia, was initiated in June 1944. This course was planned to stimulate special services officers' and enlisted men's interest in the program, and to instruct in the administration and operation of handicrafts in the special services program.

c. A handicraft program was outlined in TM 21-205¹ (Special Services Officer) prepared in September 1944, at which time Normandy D-Day (6 June 1944) plan was already in operation.

d. The officer in charge of the Handicraft Section, Headquarters, Special Services Division, War Department, visited European Theater of Operations (ETOUSA) during November, December and January of 1944-45 to set up the Theater program.

e. All the planning and directives in the late winter and early spring of 1945 were based on post hostilities and army of occupation handicraft programs.

f. Handicraft was believed to have three important potentialities:

- (1) Therapeutic Value: To aid in the cure of both physical and mental casualties and in rehabilitation work.
- (2) Prevention of Battle Fatigue: To help combatants escape from boredom and nervous tension.
- (3) Recreation: To provide recreation for able bodied men during off-duty hours, and permit continuance of hobbies and avocations.

SECTION 2

SUPPLY

4. Procurement from the Zone of Interior.

a. The War Department started ordering kits in quantity during April and May, 1944, the money being provided out of the Welfare of Enlisted Men Fund. (Appropriation Symbol 212/60502, Procurement Class 101, Quartermaster Service, Army) An initial procurement of 35,000 kits for the fiscal year 1945 was made.

b. These kits, for overseas units in all theaters of war, were made available through War Department Memorandum #4735-44 dated 6 May 1944, subject: "Basis of Issue of Special Services Items Supplied on Overseas Requisition".

c. Six of the ten different types of kits requisitioned against the original procurement arrived before the war ended in Europe.

d. These kits were planned to provide three to five men with recreational activity, and were to be the nucleus of a handicraft program in field units. The initial procurement was insufficient to provide adequately large supplies of kits and raw materials to carry out the program as originally planned.

e. The kits did not contain enough raw materials to be practical unless these could be procured locally; for example, leathercraft kits had only approximately five square feet of light leather. No provision was made for requisitioning additional raw materials, and, as a consequence, tools were often idle.

5. Local Sources.

a. Though the supply was critical in liberated countries, some use was made of tools and materials purchased locally.

b. In occupied enemy territory, many items useful in arts and crafts work were requisitioned, because there was much more material at hand.

c. Raw materials were often found amongst captured enemy materials.

d. A quantity of material and some useable tools were procured from army salvage dumps. Such items as aluminum, lucite, plexiglass, wood, brass, shell casings and other metals were found.

6. Distribution of Kits.

a. Distribution to units was made through regular supply channels.

b. In some cases kits were issued to units which did not have supervised workshops. This resulted in improper utilization since the kits were either idle or were issued to individuals to take to their quarters.

c. Many kits were distributed to hospitals through the American Red Cross which could not obtain them independently, but distribution was stopped as a result of a letter dated 13 October 1944, file SPSPA 425, to the Commanding General, European Theater of Operations, from the Deputy Director, Special Services Division, War Department, subject: "Arts and Crafts Activities".^{4,5,6} This was in accordance with the policy of the Surgeon General, which made the American Red Cross responsible both for the program and for the furnishing of supplies in medical installations.

d. Base section special services officers were advised by Chief of Special Services, Communications Zone, European Theater of Operations, as to the availability of kits and the existence of the program through the media of supply letters and conferences.

e. As of 3 May 1945, the following kits had been distributed:

11,498	on the Continent
4,406	in the United Kingdom
1,000	on loan to the American Red Cross
16,904	

Additional 17,000 kits were available for distribution, on this date.

SECTION 3

INSTALLATIONS AND EQUIPMENT

7. Personnel.

a. Such handicraft workshops as were functioning, were not staffed by personnel especially trained. The various commands in the European Theater did not receive personnel especially trained for handicraft work in time to start operation on a general scale. In consequence, personnel assigned to this activity had to set up shop as best they could, with the result that most installations did not come up to desirable standards. Men who wanted to take up an art or craft had to depend on the booklets enclosed in the kits, as there was no trained personnel with whom to consult.

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b. Only a limited number of trained personnel was available to supervise workshops operated by the American Red Cross. The American Red Cross staff, having other duties as well, could only supervise the handicraft program from time to time.

c. Results were markedly superior at installations where the personnel was interested in and had some knowledge of the work.

d. Little use was made of local civilian talent.

8. Installations.

a. Army operated.

- (1) Army workshops were located in unit areas by various special services officers who had drawn kits, and then opened a small workroom in which the men could use them.
- (2) At airfields, the Eighth Air Force was notably active and early in establishing workshops and encouraging the men to use them freely. The ground crews had available time for this activity between the departure and return of their aircraft. Plenty of machine tools and suitable materials were at hand. The men were highly trained in doing things with their hands and thus found great relief from mental strain in making all manner of gadgets and souvenirs.

b. American Red Cross Operated.

- (1) The majority of workshops in the European Theater were located in general hospitals and operated under the auspices of the American Red Cross. The workshop usually consisted of a room or rooms adjacent to or in the hospital's American Red Cross club. Many of these workshops were operating long prior to the launching of the Arts and Crafts program. Workshops located in hospitals were heavily patronized and their capacity was generally overtaxed, as they were very popular.
- (2) The American Red Cross operated workshops in a number of their larger clubs. The emphasis was on Arts rather than Crafts, because of availability of materials and demand.

9. Equipment.

a. Tools and materials.

- (1) With the exception of the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces, which had Table of Equipment tools and quantities of salvage materials on hand, the greater part of the tools and materials used in the workshops came over with the kits from the Zone of Interior. These were supplemented by local procurement, particularly of heavier tools.
- (2) Due to the shortage of supplies, the tools were adequate for the program as carried out, except for those necessary for working metals, when a large salvage stock was acquired.

b. Library.

- (1) The only books available in the workshops were those designed for beginners.
- (2) The Chief of the Handicraft Branch was sent to the Zone of Interior to design, write and contract for the commercial printing of guides for ten crafts, and to choose advanced handicraft books. The Fiscal Director, Special Services Division, Army Service Forces, was authorized to purchase 200,000 of these guides for each of ten crafts for the handicraft program and 3,000 libraries, of ten titles each of more advanced handicraft books. (Cable #15026, dated 28 February 1945, from Headquarters, Communications Zone to Governors Island, New York, in accordance with letter dated 24 January 1945, from Chief of Arts and Crafts Branch, Communications Zone, to Chief of Special and Information Services, Headquarters, Communications Zone.) These guides did not start arriving until August 1945.

10. Value of Program.

a. Therapeutic Value. The handicraft program was found to produce excellent results amongst convalescent hospital patients and rehabilitation patients.

b. Value for Able Bodied Personnel.

- (1) Amongst able bodied troops, the small amount of experience prior to 8 May 1945 showed that the morale value of the program varied greatly.
- (2) Except in instances of individual enthusiasm, the morale value for the combat soldier on duty was very small.
- (3) The number of men at combat rest centers using their few hours in this manner was very small.
- (4) Handicraft kits were beneficial to the morale of men at isolated posts, such as radar, military police and anti-aircraft units.
- (5) Handicraft workshops proved popular with troops in the Communications Zone and with ground crews at air force installations.
- (6) Subsequent experience indicates that kits would have proven beneficial to the morale of troops with idle hours to spend, such as those on transports and in staging areas.

SECTION 4

CONCLUSIONS

11. Function.

a. Handicrafts play an important part in maintaining or rebuilding morale amongst hospital and rehabilitation center patients. ¹⁴

b. As a recreational activity for rear echelon troops handicrafts provide an excellent outlet for the desire for self-expression, as well as providing a way of spending idle hours creatively.

12. Background. Prior to March 1944, the primary mission was to encourage the decoration of recreation and mess halls by military personnel in their off-duty time. Little, if any, encouragement was given to arts and crafts as a broad program.

13. The Handicraft Program in the European Theater got under way too late to be of any marked benefit prior to 8 May 1945, because of:

a. Lack of early coordinated planning and promotion in Special Services, War Department, and European Theater.

b. Inadequate qualified personnel at all echelons.

c. Excessive time lag between the ordering of kits and books in the Zone of Interior and their delivery to the European Theater.

14. Procurement of Supplies.

a. In general, kits were well designed, but provision should have been made for additional raw materials.

b. Only small quantities of tools and raw materials could be purchased in liberated countries, however, requisitioning of tools and materials in enemy territory enabled units to expand their activities considerably.

c. More use should have been made of salvage and captured enemy materials.

15. Distribution of Supplies.

a. The issuance of full kits to individuals is wasteful as thereby one man is taking up a kit designed for several.

b. All distribution for recreational purposes should have been under one control. The Surgeon General's directive to the effect that handicraft supplies for medical corps installations should not be furnished to the American Red Cross by Special Services, Communications Zone, resulted in many hospital workshops being inadequately supplied, as American Red Cross did not have adequate supplies of its own.

16. Equipment.

a. Tools and materials.

(1) The tools in the kits were adequate for the utilization of raw materials therein contained.

(2) The program could have been considerably expanded had additional, heavier tools been made available, such as: jointers, metal lathes, wood lathes, drill presses, circular saws, band saws, carborundum, buffer wheels, etc. Because of lack of tools, full advantage could not be taken of stocks of salvage materials available.

b. The guides enclosed in the kits met the needs of beginners in the various arts and crafts, but personnel who desired to pursue a hobby into its more advanced stages were handicapped by the lack of comprehensive books.

SECTION 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Board recommends that:

17. A handicraft program be retained as a War Department activity:

- a. For therapeutic use in hospitals.
- b. As recreational program for:
 - (1) Hospital patients.
 - (2) Able bodied troops, except those engaged in combat.

18. Responsibility, including administration, procurement and distribution, for the program be divided as follows:

a. Therapeutic use--to the Surgeon General.

b. Recreational use--to Special Services Division, War Department, which will request such assistance from the American Red Cross as may be desired.

19. Planning and procurement be put on a sound basis, after further research and investigation into soldier demand.

20. In the procurement and distribution of supplies:

- a. Handicraft raw materials be made available upon requisition through established supply channels.
- b. Heavier tools than those found in kits be made available on requisition.
- c. Full use be made of salvaged and captured materials.
- d. The right of requisition in enemy territory be used.
- e. Hospitals be given first priority on supplies, and isolated and inactive units be given second.

21. Workshops be established at:

- a. All general hospitals.
- b. All reinforcement depots and staging areas.
- c. All static installations.

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